

**COVID-19**

# Halfway House Residents in Manchester Claim COVID-19 Outbreak Avoidable

 By Nancy West  May 14, 2020



*JEFFREY HASTINGS photo*

Community Resources for Justice Transitional Housing, a federal halfway house in Manchester, had 16 residents and four staffers test positive for COVID-19.

**By NANCY WEST, InDepthNH.org**

**MANCHESTER** – Several residents of a federal halfway house say supervisors failed to properly handle early signs of COVID-19 two weeks ago causing it to spread throughout the building.

After losing control, supervisors arranged a hasty move for all residents of the Community Resources for Justice Transitional Housing in Manchester to a halfway house in Boston or simply sent some of them home, according to resident Kelvin Potter.

Potter, 39, of Dover, said he was tested Friday and learned Monday that his was positive, something he had feared because after beating throat cancer two years ago, his immune system is compromised.

“I’m mad because this didn’t have to happen. They could have stopped it at the first fever two weeks ago,” Potter said.

“I told my probation officer I needed to get out of the house,” Potter said, adding the officer thought he was just using COVID-19 as an excuse.

The New Hampshire Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers is looking into their complaints. State officials reported Wednesday that there are 16 residents and four staffers at the Community Resources for Justice Transitional Housing in Manchester who have tested positive for COVID-19.

State officials otherwise didn't respond to questions about the outbreak, nor did representatives of the halfway house.

The residents had been tested for COVID-19 on Friday, but didn't know the results when they were driven to Boston or sent home Sunday night, Potter said.

For the last two weeks in Manchester and during the drive and first day at the Boston facility, the Coolidge House, Potter said residents from Manchester were not properly quarantined and sometimes mingled together regardless of symptoms or test results.

"For the first day (at Coolidge House), I was with two people who tested negative," Potter said.

Robin Melone, who heads the New Hampshire Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, said her organization is looking into the complaints.

"We have been contacted by CRJ residents who have tested positive and are looking into how this happened," Melone said.

"If what we are learning is accurate, and we have reason to believe it is, this outbreak was completely avoidable. It is unconscionable that the health and lives of these residents would be treated with such disregard."

Potter called it gross negligence on the part of the staff that when the first resident developed a fever about two weeks ago, he was not immediately tested for COVID-19. The building was put in lockdown. The sick resident and his roommate were "quarantined" on the third floor with about 10 other residents but continued to share the same bathrooms.

"So even though they were quarantined to their room they still used the same bathrooms as the rest of us on the third floor," Potter said. He emailed InDepthNH.org and called on his cell phone from the Coolidge House.

Cleaning company vehicles were parked Thursday outside Community Resources for Justice Transitional Housing at 1490 Elm St. in Manchester.

Potter was sentenced to five years probation for wire fraud, but most of the other residents were transitioning into society from federal prisons, he said.

Potter said he had been working as a car detailer until the virus closed down work. He has since lined up two jobs, one delivering packages and the other to be trained operating a forklift making close to \$20 an hour and said he is looking forward to going home to Dover in July.

Potter said he personally complained to the staff more than once as did other residents, but nothing was done. Potter said the first man's roommate got a fever a few days later.

"So now both of these residents showed fever and should have been tested but they were not, even though the resident that showed the first fever asked them to get him medical attention," Potter said.

A few days later, a third resident had symptoms, body aches, major headaches and diarrhea, he said.

"I notified the staff about this myself. They did nothing. They took his temperature and since he didn't show a fever they weren't concerned, even though this third resident was having all those other symptoms and felt so sick he stopped coming out of his room," Potter said.

Potter said after the third resident's roommate developed severe respiratory issues and told the staff he needed to go to the hospital, he was ignored until his brother showed up at the halfway house to check on his condition.

"Finally, the staff called an ambulance and they took him to the hospital," Potter said. The resident remained in the hospital and the staff decided to test the other three residents, he said.

It is unclear how many residents were moved. Potter thought it might be as many as 25, but wasn't sure.

Saquon Moore, 31, another resident of the halfway house in Manchester who was moved to Coolidge House, provided a similar account.

"These people put my life in danger," Moore said. He said he wanted to complain publicly, although his test came back negative, because he believed that could change because of his exposure to COVID-19.

"I've got nothing to lose," Moore said.

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